

A Special Resource for the Future

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Soil, water, plants...put them all together like the ingredients of a Louisiana gumbo and you have what are known as wetlands. Wetlands are very special areas that act as biological filters on the landscape, provide habitat for wildlife and migratory birds, and support about 5,000 different plant species throughout the country.

Wetlands are among the richest and most productive habitats on earth. Trees are a vital part of those habitats—especially the habitats along the Mississippi River known as the Mississippi River Alluvial Valley. These vegetated areas consist of bottomland hardwoods and are located along floodplains, or former floodplains of major rivers.

During the late '60's and early '70's hundreds of thousands of acres of bottomland hardwoods were cleared for crop production. Many of those acres, once cleared, were marginal for crop production because of frequent flooding problems. Today, many landowners are voluntarily converting those marginal cropland areas back to productive wetlands through the Wetlands Reserve Program, or WRP. Trees are a big part of the long-range WRP restoration efforts, and trees are the reason that Peter Williams is in business.

Peter Williams and his wife Alfreda, are the owners of *Resource One Nursery*, a hardwood nursery in north Louisiana, along Interstate 20 about 50 miles west of the Mississippi River. Peter and Alfreda grow all types of hardwood seedlings used for wetland restoration projects.

"We grow millions of seedlings every year for the Wetlands Reserve Program—a voluntary USDA program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service," explains Williams. "The Wetlands Reserve Program, or WRP, has helped many landowners in the state by giving them the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property."

Landowners have really taken advantage of WRP and have applied for it in large numbers. In fact, Louisiana leads the nation in acres enrolled—over 130,000 acres.

"Alfreda and I feel that we are a vital part of the whole restoration effort," said Williams. "Our nursery produces the seedlings that grow into the trees that provide the habitat and food for wildlife and waterfowl."

The nursery work at *Resource One* starts in February of each year. Williams and his crew first take time to review what will be done in the coming months, and what species of trees are to be planted on the 55-acre site.

"We begin by disking the land in February between the late-winter rains," explained Williams. "Then we run a piece of equipment over the land called a 'land plane' to smooth or level the ground as much as possible. After that we apply fertilizer and also lime if needed."

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After the land is disked, leveled, and fertilized, Peter and his crew make beds, or rows, with his tractors and equipment.

“We broadcast the hardwood seed directly on top of 60” raised beds, or rows explained Williams. “Everything is planted from seed. We purchase seed from a seed company and usually have to place our order well in advance of the actual purchase date.”

Resource One Nursery is able to produce many different species of seedlings for the Wetlands Reserve Program. Nuttall oak, willow oak, green ash, water oak, cherrybark oak, water hickory (bitter pecan), overcup oak, and shumard oak are just some of the species planted on the nursery. *Resource One* has been very productive over the past 2 years producing millions of trees for various wetland restoration efforts.

“In 1998, when Alfreda and I were first thinking about going into the nursery business, I met with Mr. David F. Cooper, III, of Cooper Agricultural Management of Rayville, Louisiana,” said Williams. “Mr. Cooper had a lot of experience in agricultural enterprises and I came to rely on him as a good source of information and assistance related to agriculture and farm programs. He’s helped me every step of the way.”

Cooper is no stranger to wetland restoration or the Wetlands Reserve Program.

“Restoring our natural resources is very important to me and my family,” said Cooper. “We have a WRP contract, and we’re definitely huge supporters of WRP, and Peter Williams as well. Peter and my son John have worked hard to make *Resource One Nursery* a success, and I’m proud of both of them. Peter works hard because he knows how hard life can be.”

After graduating from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, formerly the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Peter worked as a recreation director for the City of Lafayette, Louisiana. He has also worked as a consultant for the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Administration, mainly in public housing areas. Peter, his wife Alfreda, and his four children live in Lettsworth, Louisiana, a small community near the central part of the state.

“Working for HUD, serving as a mentor, and experiencing life in the inner cities made me want to help people even more,” said Williams. “Seeing all the adversities in public housing areas helped me realize that I could make a difference. I also wanted to show people that there are opportunities. I wanted the chance to create jobs for others who were less fortunate. David Cooper gave me that chance by helping me get started with *Resource One Nursery*.”

Williams hires many seasonal workers from diverse backgrounds—both male and female. Two full-time employees, John B. Williams and James Moore work with Williams on a daily basis. Peter Williams, John Cooper, and all the *Resource One* workers continue to work hard so that there are enough trees for WRP for the future.

When trees are planted on old, marginal cropland tracts, those areas do indeed become a special resource for the future. Nurseries like *Resource One* are helping to provide those needed trees.

Peter Williams has seen and done many things in his lifetime, but growing trees is special to him. He loves to work on the land and see things grow from the seeds he’s planted. Even more gratifying to him is the fact that his trees are part of a special resource for the future—not so much for our generation, but for generations to come.